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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LISBON 000516

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SUBJECT: SOCIALISTS WIN PORTUGUESE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

REF: A. LISBON 493
B. LISBON 510

¶1. Summary: On September 27, the ruling Socialist Party won a plurality of the seats in the Portuguese Parliament with 37 percent of the vote. The Social Democratic Party, led by former Finance Minister Manuela Ferreira Leite, came in second with 29 percent of the vote. The Socialists lost 25 seats, while other parties gained seats, increasing their representation in Parliament. Election assessment teams concluded that the elections were well organized with no disruptions or significant issues. While too early to predict a coalition of the Socialists with another party, the most likely scenario is a continued Socialist government.
End Summary.

¶2. According to unofficial results of Portugal's September 27 parliamentary elections, the ruling Socialist Party (PS) led by Prime Minister Jose Socrates won a plurality of the seats in the 230-seat Parliament with 37 percent of the vote. The Socialists, who have ruled with an absolute majority (121 seats) since 2005, lost 25 seats. The opposition Social Democratic Party (PSD) trailed with 29 percent of the vote, followed by the Popular Party (CDS-PP) with 11 percent, the Left Bloc with 10 percent, and the Communist Party with 8 percent. The PSD gained three seats, while the Popular Party gained 10 seats, and the Left Bloc gained 8, doubling its presence (from 8 to 16 seats) in the Parliament. The Communists gained four seats. Voter turnout was 61 percent.

Official Results to be Released

¶3. The official results are expected within 10 days, at which point the President will ask the Socialist Party to form a government. In his victory speech September 27, Prime Minister Socrates left open the door for a possible coalition without specifically naming any parties; however, the most likely scenario is a minority Socialist-led government with ad hoc agreements with the left and the right to pass measures through the Parliament.

Media Reaction

¶4. Local press announced the Socialist victory with reserved declarations, such as "Limited PS Victory," "No Absolute Majority for the PS," "Absolute Negotiation," and "And Now What, Socrates?," that foreshadow the difficult road ahead. Press also highlighted the surprising third place finish of the right-of-center CDS-PP and the fourth place finish for the (far left) Left Bloc that effectively doubled the party's current representation in Parliament.

¶5. Media noted the disappointing results for the PSD and attributed them to the party's weak campaign, its position on the controversial high-speed rail-link project, anti-Spain statements, and inclusion of polemic figure Deputy Antonio

Preto (who has been accused of corruption) as a candidate.

Election Assessment

¶ 6. Emboffs visited eight polling centers in four precincts on election day, and observed that the centers were well organized, with short lines, voters of all ages, including families with children, hand sanitizers as a preventive measure against the H1N1 virus, and clear signs directing voters to their stations. Emboffs did not notice any political propaganda or disruptions, nor any special access for the handicapped.

¶ 7. The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) Election Assessment Mission concluded that the elections went well. Deputy Head of Mission Michael Meyer told poloff September 28 that the polling centers were, for the most part, easily accessible although access was difficult for the handicapped. He also noted that there was a certain level of informality, but a high degree of confidence and experience among election officials. Large political parties and local observers were present at several centers. He noted one small glitch)- use of wrong ballots -- in one polling center in the Viana do Castelo district in the northern region. But overall, the elections were well organized with no disruptions or significant issues.

¶ 8. Post will report septel further election and post-election analysis. Portugal's municipal elections will be held on October 11.

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